Hawai‘i
Poetry Resource Guide

Star Poets

Ideas to teach poetry to students in grades K-12
# Contents

## Hawai‘i

### Poetry Resource Guide

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Poetry Fever

A regular guy
reads a touching poem
Inspired
he courageously writes his own
passes his genius on to another kid
She reads it
and cries
Motivated
she writes four poems
Published
letting the world know
how she truly feels
in a book
passed on
Confident
I write a poem
just like
this

by Cecilia Chun
7th grade, Niu Valley Middle School
Honorable mention winner, Star Poets 2004

Yes, poetry can be infectious – that we know based on the stacks of Star Poets entries we’ve received from the young people of Hawai‘i. When Windward Community College and Starbucks Coffee started the Star Poets project six years ago, we hoped to give students a chance to say what was on their minds. Every year, thousands of students in grades 3 - 12 have done just that – in poems that are funny, touching and sometimes painful to read.

Over the years, we’ve also heard from teachers and parents who wanted more ideas to inspire students to write. This book is in response to those requests – a resource guide for anyone who wants to help young people tap into their creative spirit.

The contributors include some of the teachers of former Star Poets winners as well as master teachers who have worked in Poets-in-the-Schools programs and other projects. All have generously shared some of their favorite lessons as a way to keep the love of poetry alive. Mahalo to everyone who has contributed to this project.

For details on the Star Poets contest, entry forms and to view more student poems, go to “Community Programs” at www.windward.hawaii.edu. Happy writing!

– Libby Young
Star Poets coordinator and Windward Community College English and journalism professor
In the moonlight
the monarch butterfly
dances
through the swarm of
flowers

– Rebekah Johnson

Art by Rebekah Johnson
2nd Grade, Ahuimanu Elementary
Poems with Writing and Art Activities
by Susan Lee St. John, Le Jardin Academy/Poet-in-the-Schools and Michelle Tamayose, art educator

Project #1
“List Poem”
Create or derive words from three separate lists: adjectives, nouns, verbs. Optional: time, place. Topics can also include environmental issues, Hawaiian, family, animals.

Art Activity: “Picture Poem”
Create images developed from “List Poem” with consideration of composition: focal point, foreground, middle ground and background. Discuss what happens to colors when they overlap, and how do you make your main object/focus stand out.

Materials needed: colored pencils, oil pastels, paper.

Word Lists

Adjectives
- purple
- violet
- orange
- gold
- vermillion
- pink
- red
- ruby
- scarlet
- crimson
- green
- aqua
- turquoise
- beige
- ivory
- black
- blue
- indigo
- yellow

On the Earth
- sugar cane
- mango
- ferns
- carnations
- sweet potato
- tomato
- watermelon

In the Sky
- rainbow
- lightning
- thunder
- moon
- darkness
- sunlight
- rain
- planets
- Mars
- Saturn

The Body
- hands
- feet
- wrist
- fingers
- bones
- lungs

Animals
- monarch butterfly
- wasp
- shark
- chicken
- starfish
- sea horse
- blue whale
- clam
- mynah bird
- lobster
- slug

Verbs
- spins
- jumps
- whips
- dashes
- laughs
- shouts
- flies
- leaps
- dances
- roars
- sings
- cries
- slides
- carries
- sparks
- whirls
- sleeps
- greets
- creeps
- washes
- bathes
- crawls
- slithers
- brushes
- whispers
- touches
- sits
- stirs
- awakens
- purifies
- floats
- wishes
Project #2

“Color Poem”

Pick a color. What things remind you of this color? What does it sound like? What does it smell like? What does it feel like?

Student Example:

Mahogany

Like termites biting
Through the wood to the dirt
While roach-like centipedes
Crawl in boxes
Mahogany
Like stomping through the forest
Like bears pounding tree trunks
Like the sweet aroma of pot roast
Cooking in the kitchen.

by Kelly Lance, 4th Grade

Art Activity: “Watercolor Wonder”

Pick a favorite image in your poem and compose a picture. Watercolor techniques are introduced; “watercolor washes” can be used to create soft, subtle backgrounds, and “pastel resists” can be used to bring out the main object.

Materials needed: oil pastels, watercolors, brushes, containers for water, paper.

Project #3

The “List Poem” in Margaret Wise Brown’s

The Important Book

Objective

To encourage students to think and articulate qualities of different objects.

Description

Begin the lesson by reading Margaret Wise Brown’s The Important Book. Each page is a verse about a different object: “The important thing about a daisy is that it is white. It is yellow in the middle, it has long white petals, and bees sit on it, it has a ticklish smell, it grows in green fields, and there are always lots of daisies. But the most important thing about a daisy is that it is white.”

Ask the students to notice the structure of the verse; the beginning line is repeated in the end line. We then write a class poem. Someone chooses an object and we think about its most important quality. Is it its use? What it does (a verb)? Its color, smell, size, shape, sound or texture? For older children, you might even think about its role in history or myth.

After we write a few verses together, the children understand the process and write their own poems. It is helpful to pass out a list of nouns (animals, plants, things in the sky or on earth or in the ocean, minerals) and a list of adjectives.

Student Examples:

The most important thing
about the moon
is that it is yellow
The moon is small
but it lights up the sky
the moon is round
but the most important thing
about the moon
is that it is yellow

–Gabriella Ortega
First Grade
The most important thing about water is you drink it. It covers the earth. You take a bath in it. It makes you cold. Its cold and hot. But the most important thing about water is that you drink it.

—Matt Elento
First Grade

The most important thing about the wasp is that it stings. It can fly, and it lives in a hive-nest. It’s black and yellow. But the most important thing about the wasp is that it stings.

—Sam St. John
First Grade

Art Activity: “Collage Art”
Cut pictures, colors, shapes related to your poem. Discuss previous ideas and techniques used to make main objects stand out (outline, enlarge objects, add bright colors) and think about how objects can physically move forward. Compose a collage.

Materials needed: construction paper, scissors, glue, colored pencils, oil pastels, watercolor.

Poetry Resource Guide

GRADE SCHOOL POETRY IDEAS

Poems with Writing and Art Activities CONTINUED

My students had a Garden Tea Party and incorporated art and etiquette.

The students made their tea cups and saucer (art), learned table manners and the history of tea parties. We had a formal table setting outdoors. Each student selected his or her best written work and shared it with members of the class.

We invited the support staff as our guests. After their poetry reading, the students were served breakfast with tea by parent volunteers and teacher. It was a very pleasant and educational morning.

Just for fun
by Elizabeth Sakamoto, St. Anthony Grade School, Maui
Goal
Students will create a poem about their favorite color.

Instructions

Step 1
Name your favorite color (e.g. red).

Step 2
Brainstorming:
List nouns that suggest “red.”
List verbs that suggest “red.”
List sounds that suggest “red.”
List events that suggest “red.”
List emotions that suggest “red.”
List people that suggest “red.”

(It’s easier to list these in columns on sheets of paper.)

Ask yourself:  Where do I see this color?  
How does it make me feel?  
Why do I like this color?  
What is my favorite thing that is red?

Step 3
Add adjectives to the nouns. Add adverbs to the verbs.

Step 4 – First draft
Incorporate these phrases into sentences. You might tie them together with a theme. For the poem “Red” (see poem), the theme centered on what she saw at the shopping mall.

Step 5 – Second draft
Find synonyms for your adjectives and adverbs. Make a strong statement about the color. For the poem “Pink,” similes and metaphors were emphasized for adverbs, movement, and setting the scene.

3rd Grade
Honorable Mention, Star Poets 2004

Red
Red is creamy shiny lip gloss  
Hidden in tiny zippered purses  
Hanging from slanting teen-aged shoulders.  
Red is bright curly hair that sprouts from  
A head filled with blasting rap music  
That makes bones dance til they almost crack.  
Red is spiky high-heeled shoes with  
Fancy skinny straps that shout  
“Here I come!”  
RED IS COOL!

by Kasey Cachola, 3A  
St. Theresa School

Pink
Pink is a crayon that can glide  
like a frosty, playful penguin on slippery ice, giving life to a dark dull picture.  
Pink is itsy bitsy shrimp from a salty ocean garden  
that sizzle and crackle to the song of bubbling oil.  
Pink is a rose with petals so sweet,  
that a bee would dance gracefully  
on it just to feel the caress of its hug.  
Pink comes alive to brighten my world!

by Maurilani Tsukada, 3A  
St. Theresa School
**Color Poems**

*by Melvin Spencer, Na‘au Learning Center*

**Goal**
To help students use figurative language, concrete images and sensory language.

**Instructions**
1. Brainstorm a list of color items with your class.
2. Pick three items from the class list.
3. Write three sentences with your class using the following pattern as a sample poem.

```
Color + Noun + Class list + Verb
```

Finish sentence (must make sense).

**Examples:**

*Blue*

Blue sounds like a portable fan,
You can hold it in your hand,

Blue smells like a potion
When you throw it in the ocean,

Blue tastes like pie,
You can find it in the sky,

Blue feels like air
Going through your hair.

*The Shy Colors of the Rainbow*

Scarlet is the color
of apples ripening,
Jupiter burning,
and cherries blooming,
when I see the color scarlet.

Coral is the color
of the sunset healing,
the campfire whimpering,
and love birds singing,
when I see the color coral.

Xanthic is the color
of the angel's halo,
floating gently above her head,
the sunlight hushing over the clouds,
and puakenikeni whispering in the tree,
when I see the color xanthic.

Emerald is the color
of young bamboo shoots lifting in Chinatown,
the gecko singing in the night,
and the ilima bush opening in the garden,
when I see the color emerald.

Sapphire is the color
of my mother's earrings fluttering,
the Seven Seas unfolding,
the fighting fish fluttering his tail,
when I see the color sapphire.

Indigo is the color
of a Crayola coloring,
an ocean cascading,
and the dark sky crying,
when I see the color indigo.

Lilac is the color
of Mauna Loa rising toward the evening sky,
the sweet potato waking on the stove,
and the fragrant lavender dreaming in the pot,
when I see the color lilac.

*by Daena Mau*
**Goal**

Exposure to the haiku form of poetry.

In a haiku, just one thing happens: the poet describes one moment, one feeling, one thing that catches his eye. One Japanese poet describes a haiku as a “one-breath poem.” It uses only as many words as can be easily spoken in one breath.

**Instructions**

Sequence of lessons:
- Read many different haiku written by various poets, both Japanese and foreign.
- Discuss the feeling, the point of the haiku.
- Use matching cards to sharpen observational skills. Find the haiku and drawing that match.
- Go for walks to gardens. Allow students to quietly observe moments.
- Write haiku from their experience.
- Use watercolor to paint a picture that complements the haiku.

Supplies: variety of haiku cards and books; watercolor paints.

**Examples:**

**Haiku #1**

In the cool breeze
the caterpillar
dangles lazily.

**Haiku #2**

Blown about
in gusty winds,
little butterflies.

**Haiku #3**

The snail
goes to bed and gets up
just as he is.
Goal
I teach grades 3-6 Gifted and Talented classes. The focus of the program has been slowly changing from language arts enrichment to video technology. I’m struggling with letting go of the creative language arts part of the program so I have to find ways to incorporate the two. It’s getting more and more difficult, as I find myself putting in more time to finish up projects we cannot accomplish during our “pull out” time slot.

Writing haiku seemed the perfect combination of writing poetry and using the zoom feature to capture still photos, and to compose a visual of the written haiku. The following lessons were the steps I took to expose, provide experience, and produce satisfying finished works. Each grade level is working on a slide production with the iMovie program to share the collection from their class. Editing, adding titles, transitions, and music will be used to enhance the production.

Instructions

Lesson 1
Share haiku poetry
(read orally by the teacher)

Cricket Songs
Japanese Haiku translated by Harry Behn

Wind, Sand, and Sky
by Rebecca Caudill

Cool Melons- Turn to Frogs!
The Life and Poems of Issa
Story and Haiku Translations
by Matthew Gullub

What is a haiku?
• form of Japanese poetry
  • has a pattern of syllables:
    line 1 has 5 syllables
    line 2 has 7 syllables
    line 3 has 5 syllables
  • Focus on a small aspect of the subject

Let’s try it out . . .

We started with a food subject because it seems to be the easiest for children to relate to. The following poem was read to them:

Spitting, sputtering
annoying my enjoyment
watermelon seeds.

Point out how the focus is one small part of the watermelon. Set them loose to try their hand at it. Got some great watermelon haiku.

It tastes so yummy
My mouth waters in delight
So red and juicy.
– Katie, 4th grade

Sweet watery scent
A seed as black and small within
Life springs from its core
– Evan, 6th grade

Lesson 2
The Assignment

Talk about the final product. The class will produce a slide show with their haiku and a still photo they will capture to accompany it. It will be produced on iMovie with music title, subtitles, and transitions.

Here are the criteria students need to keep in mind before beginning this assignment:
• Subject will be nature
• Use the zoom feature on the camera to capture the moment in your poem
• Write more than one haiku (choices)
• Keep in mind, you are zooming-in on a small aspect of something in nature

Activity

The class was handed clipboards with paper and pencils. They were instructed to make a list of all the possible “zoom-in” sights as they walked around the courtyard.
outside the classroom. After making a list that satisfied them, they could begin writing the poems. It was not as easy a task as they thought it would be.

**Lesson 3**

**Work Time (two class periods)**

Students continued working outdoors, composing their haiku. Those who wrote at least two different haikus and felt they could choose one were ready to take their photo. The students gained experience in using the still photo feature of the video camera. They learned how to replay or delete their photos. More class time was spent outdoors until all the students took a photo to best represent their haiku. It was imperative to take the photos before working on the final draft of the poem because the guavas were falling off the tree and the monkey pod blossoms were becoming scarce. For some individuals, the photo dictated what their poem would be about.

**Lesson 4**

**Editing Poems and Production**

Time is spent using the thesaurus, searching for the right words with the right number of syllables. Students take turns working on the computer, adding translations and titles (this includes superimposing their poem on the photo they have taken) to their photos. It’s a long process. Only three students actually get to the computer and therefore it takes two or three class periods to do this phase.

**Lesson 5**

**Adding Audio**

The final step to complete our production is to add music and to record the students reading their own poem. We plan to share this project with the school by including it in the closed circuit program.

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*Haikus written by students:*

- **Tiny red petals**
  like soft scales on a red fish
  red ginger tower
  – Taryn, 5th grade

- **The dew on the leaf**
  crystals glistening at dawn
  Mother Nature’s gems.
  – Kylee, 4th grade

- **Fallen of the tree**
  hungry and munching away
  won’t taste very good
  – Adam, 5th grade

- **The blooming flower**
  struggling to burst open
  every bud’s dream
  – Jared, 4th grade

- **Swirling and floating**
  like feathers riding the wind
  leaves land on the grass
  – Ryo, 6th grade

- **A feather drifting**
  destinations are unknown
  floating far away
  – Evan, 6th grade

- **Beautiful petals**
  reflecting the sun and sky
  like gems to your eyes
  – Erik, 6th grade
Goal

Students will take a mental snapshot of a memory and create a focused, meaningful poem about it, guided by an opening quote. (This is a great alternative to the “What did I do this summer/Christmas/Easter vacation” essay.)

Instructions

1. As a whole class, have students share some activities they enjoyed over vacation.
2. Ask students to brainstorm about ten memories of their vacation. They quickly sketch them and jot down short captions. They can “talk story” about their memories with their neighbors as they sketch.
3. Students choose one memory of the ten. To help them focus on just one part the experience, have them replay it like a video in their minds, then “click!” freeze a scene. Students sketch this snapshot on the back of their paper.
4. Have them label their sketch/snapshot with some of the five senses. For example, for New Year’s mochi pounding, it might be uncles laughing as they pound mochi (hearing), gooey mochi between their fingers (feeling), etc. Jot down in the corner the main emotions—their feelings.
5. Focus on the main meaning of their poem by having them recall a quote that someone said, or if it was silent, a quote that they thought. Write the quote as the first line of the poem. It’s important to write it down word for word to capture the speaker’s voice. (Interestingly enough, usually one of the first few quotes they think of captures the main meaning of their poem.) The quote could be as short as “Good bye.”
6. Go through the rest of the writing process. Some students might prefer writing their rough draft of the poem first and then adding the quote to the top of it. Others who are frustrated writing rough drafts of the poems might want to go back to their brainstorm sheet and choose another memory from the ten.
7. When conferencing with students, have them cut out every word in their poem that doesn’t deal with the meaning of the quote. Others might need help finding a more meaningful quote. Also, help them take out “being” verbs to make writing more active, take out or replace repeated words (unless it’s done on purpose), show, not tell how they’re feeling, etc.

“See what the seams look like”
It looks like it’s a curve.

“Watch the ball hit the bat”
My bat makes contact.
Music to my ear
I start to grin

“Good hitting today”
Dad puts his hand on my helmet
twists my head over to see his face
Hot diggity dog!

“Want to share a Caesar salad?”

Grandma
Aunty Monna
Aunty Ann
Aunty Joan
Uncle John
Sean
my dad
me

We all traded salads
Grandma shared with dad
I tasted my dad’s
I tried Aunty Joan’s
Aunty Joan had Italian chef salad
with meat, tomato, cheese, cucumber
Not just lettuce

Fuselli with white
primavera sauce
It was really liquidy
So dad added his to mine

Laughing
Talking story
Mixing together like a creamy sauce mixed with spices
The sound of slurping noodles around the table
Like people who never ate before.
Goal
Young writers will explore the surprises of thinking metaphorically. Young writers will practice and apply visualization skills. Young writers will create poems that offer a “3-D” experience.

Instructions

Day One: Initial homework assignment
Everybody has a special place—a place that is so much a part of you and your heart that you just wouldn’t be the same without it. This might be a real place—a tree house or a favorite beach or a chair—or it could be a different kind of “place”—a surfboard or a theater stage or even a book or a grandmother’s lap or a violin or an easel & paintbrush. My special place is my writing—a dimension I can step into and find adventure and surprises and new understandings (not to mention challenges and frustrations!). What is your special place? Think about it for a while before you choose. Note: you need to have a very specific memory (or memories) about this place!

Fill in the following for tomorrow:
1. My special place is...
2. A specific memory I have about this place is...

Day Two: Class discussion of student choices
Be sure each student has recorded a specific memory; this could be a remembered moment, a series of experiences, or a specific person linked to the chosen place.

Day Three: Visualization/Freewrite
1. Darken the room and allow students to close their eyes and get comfortable—but with paper and pencil close at hand. Ask them to “step into” their place imaginatively, and lead them through a 3-D visualization. You might suggest that they “look up” (Are they inside or outside? What time of day is it? What details do they notice?); “look down” (What’s on their feet? What details do they notice?); turn slowly, noting colors, movements, intriguing images; reach out and touch something. I always ask: “What are you hearing?”; “What are you smelling?”; “What are you feeling-on your face, under your feet, etc?”; “What are you thinking/feeling inside?”
2. Students jot a list of the details they just experienced. (Some students may want to begin listing during the visualization.) Remind them to record smells, sounds, “touch”, feelings, etc.
3. Ask the students to “step into” the memory associated with their place and list/freewrite for about five minutes. I offer suggestions intermittently to give them a fresh “boost.”
4. Students read back over their lists/freewrites and highlight favorite details, images, and thoughts. Invite students to share these, especially those that surprised them.

Day Four: Composing
1. The class reads/discusses sample place poems written by students in previous years.
2. Using word processors, students input favorite details, images, and thoughts from yesterday’s freewrites, lining these out so they “look like” poems. Encourage students to expand, delete, and reorganize their details until they find a poem they like.
3. Peer edit.
4. It’s always nice to have a celebratory class reading!

Example of student work:

Nut-Brown Wood
I remember the beautiful, smooth, nut-brown wood. Curving elegantly in arcs, with black trimming. I remember the day I bought it. No more screechy, small violin. I was getting a cello. October third, My grandfather brought it to the hotel room. It smelled of a pine forest, and felt cool and smooth under my small fingers. And I played: The music flowed out In a deep, Rich sound Not even notes. Just a sound Of power.

—by Erin Swift, 6th grade, Seabury Hall
1st place, Star Poets 2003
Feelings Poem; Poetry Line Breaks
by Angela Church, Punahou School

Goal
To place appropriate line breaks in poem. To use brainstormed lists to create a feelings poem.

Instructions
1. Read a few of the best poems from the previous day.
2. Write the following on the board: I am a cloud If you want me you have to wait until it rains.
Poets look for line breaks. Where would you put the line breaks for this poem?
I am a cloud / If you want me/ you have to wait /until it rains.
They might rewrite it like this:
  I am a cloud,
  If you want me,
  you have to wait
  until it rains.

Some people like skinny poems and they might decide to write it differently:
  I
  am
  a cloud
  If
  you
  want me
  you have to
  wait
  until it
  rains

Others might want to give it a shape like a raindrop. This is called a concrete poem. Choose one way to write your first poem.

3. Share three poems about feelings with the students. Ask the students how the author makes them feel. The author didn’t just say he was mad or sad, he thought of a way to describe his feelings by creating an image. Review meaning of simile.

4. Take out your word list from yesterday. A way you can choose just the right words to help create a feeling is to brainstorm words by categories. For example, brainstorm Hawaiian plants not on the list (have students write these on the back of their papers as the class brainstorms together).

  Brainstorm things in the environment not on the list. (e.g. A flower blooming . . . )
  Brainstorm feelings (e.g. love, hate, sadness, fear).
  Homework: Write a poem about feelings. Try not to use a cliche. For example, don’t say: I feel like a bomb ready to explode. Try to use a simile, comparing the feeling to something from one of your lists. Put your line breaks in your poem.

  Student Examples:

  When I’m Mad

  When I’m mad,
  I’m a big wave
  Crashing on the hot sand,
  Like a volcano
  Sizzling down
  To the great deep blue sea.
  I’m as mad as a hurricane
  Tearing houses apart.

  Running Away

  I feel like I am running away from myself,
  running, running,
  into the passage of time.
  But it is always
  right behind me,
  following me as I run.
  No matter where I go,
  no matter what I do,
  it is following me.
  It feels like I am running away from myself,
  running, running,
  away in fear.

  —by Katherine Brooks
The Bus Driver

I’m on a bright, post-it yellow bus of life
That won’t stop until darkness
We’re leaving childhood
But I don’t want to trade

Roller blades for polished shoes
Scooters for an overpriced used car
My chores for a job I don’t even like

This trip frightens me
I have to turn this BEAST around
“Let’s go back!” I shriek at the driver
Who turns without stopping
I look
I look
It’s ME.

by Alecia Tumpap, 7th grade, Seabury Hall
3rd place, Star Poets 2004

Art by Judith Render Carlson
Two-Word Poetry Assignment
by Joe Tsujimoto, Punahou School, Honolulu

**Assignment**
The first writing assignment of the year; poetry writing will last 2 months.

Example:

Hands
Birds

–by M.C. Richards

1. How do we read this? How do we make meaning of this?

2. Have 2 students stand next to each other at the front of the room, one short, one tall. What do people tend to do when they see 2 things set side by side? [Yes, compare]

3. What words, then, could we put between “Hands” and “Birds” to make a sentence explaining the relationship between the 2 words? [Yes, “Hands” are like “Birds”]

4. So, how are hands like birds? [both can be graceful...as in dance...like ballet...or hula; both can build things...like houses and nests; both can be dirty...birds plop everywhere; both can be bloody or cruel...they have nails or claws...birds have beaks, too; both can be nervous and flutter or tremble...or when they’re cold or afraid—and so forth]

5. One definition for a good poem is that it seems like a bottomless well from which we can draw almost endless meaning. Another definition is that, even if a poem suggests only one meaning, it can be very good because of its Rightness; we experience a heightened recognition and, in the best instances, Radiance. Another definition, even if a poem’s meaning cannot be articulated, there is something special going on here, like one heart speaking to another.

6. Assignment: Write 3 two-word poems. Title your work Poem I, Poem II, Poem III. That way your parents or friends will read your words differently. Suggestions: Choose your words from different domains of experience; choose concrete, specific nouns. Warnings: Avoid the following types of combinations: objects-action (door open); object-attribute (sun hot); object-setting (star space).

7. When I read the following student examples, just raise your hands if you can explain the connection. To encourage you, remember this: There are no single right answers to meaningful questions about literature. [to save space, I’ve omitted titles and authors]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>spotlight</th>
<th>refrigerator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pimple</td>
<td>diary</td>
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<td>bra</td>
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<td>hammock</td>
<td>guestbook</td>
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<td>grandmother</td>
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<td>raison</td>
<td>crucifix</td>
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<td>marriage</td>
<td>canary</td>
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<tr>
<td>handcuffs</td>
<td>Michael Jackson</td>
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</tbody>
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I read many students examples, suggesting standards and the scope of possibility.
Circle Poem
by Joe Tsujimoto, Punahou School, Honolulu

Assignment

1. Write a poem where your title “triggers” the word or phrase of your first line, which, in turn, “triggers” the next line, and so forth.

Examples:

Rock Music
Adam
Apple
Rhythm
Ruby
Foot tapping
Ring
Nervousness
Wedding gown
Test
White
Driving
Snow
Bumper cars
King Kong
Whiplash
Curious George
Slave
Christmas
Henny Penny
Eve

2. Try to surprise us with each new line, taking us each time to a new world—taking us on a rich, various trip through time, place, ideas, objects, colors, tastes, names, etc.

Motorcycle
Harley Davidson
Jack Hammer
Tunnel Digger
John Henry
slave
Abraham Lincoln
Stage Coach
Farm
Hogs

3. Your poem will end when your last line “circles” back to the beginning, approximating your title.

— by Alex White
Lists of Sensory Experiences

by Susan Lee St. John, Le Jardin Academy/Poet-in-the-Schools

Goal
To write material for the students’ portfolios, which they can draw from for later poems.

Description
Many poets—Walt Whitman, Allen Ginsburg, Anne Waldman, to name a few—use lists to build and intensify images. This exercise, adapted from an exercise in Barbara Drake’s Writing Poetry (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1983, p. 32), asks students to make lists using all five of their senses. Have the students write five of each category. They don’t need to write complete sentences, just phrases. I do this exercise early in the year so that students can pull images from their list whenever they get “stuck.” See the lesson on the James Wright poem (High School section, p. 26) for a way to incorporate this list into a poem.

Lists of Sensory Experiences

1. List experiences of light or in light.
   eg. “Swimming among the phosphorescence of the reef fish”
2. List experiences of dark or in darkness.
   eg. “Sleeping beneath shuttered windows”
3. List experiences of or in dimness.
   eg. “The ironwoods in the faint light of dawn”
4. List experiences of color.
   eg. “Running, running her skin blazed scarlet”
5. List experiences of tasting or smelling something sweet
   eg. “Chewing the tough fibers of the sugar cane”
6. List experiences of tasting (or smelling or hearing) something sour or tart.
   eg. “Squeezing the lime juice”
7. List experiences of savory.
   eg. “the smell of sage and thyme and roast turkey”
8. List experiences of heat.
   eg. “Under the white sun in the Savannah”
9. List experiences of cold.
   eg. “the blue shiver of ice”
10. List experiences of silence.
    eg. “the pickles sitting in the dark refrigerator”
11. List experiences of noise.
    eg. “The children preparing for bed”
12. List experiences of fragrance.
    eg. “The wild ginger on the damp grass”
13. List experiences of fetor (bad odor).
    eg. “fermented mackerel sitting in a bowl”

Student Example:

1. The suddenly bright sunlight, filtering through blinds.
   The flickering of a television upon a dark wall.
2. The sheets of rain, drowning our the light.
   A swirling black cup of coffee, strangely engaging.
3. I can just see my car’s hood, gleaming dimly in the starlight.
4. Great green ceilings peer down upon me.
5. Eating a piece of plain bread after peeling an orange.
6. A shrill call of a bird, strangely high and long.
   Citrus flavor, bursting upon the world.
7. A piece of browned meat, seemingly content with its slow flavor.
8. A fever catches me unexpectedly, growing from my spine.
9. Ice in my tea, floating silently as miniature glaciers.
   Water seems out of place, flowing from a faucet mounted into the cement.
10. My footsteps break the silence, like a clock.
   The sound of keys, homework too late at night.
11. A friendly chattering, the water upon the roof.
12. The soft ground seems almost like a sweet cake, strangely giving.
13. A sick sweetness sits in the entire theatre, inescapable.

–Bill White
**A New Spin: The Pop Icon Prose Poem**

by Tracee Lee, English teacher and Bamboo Ridge “Best Poetry” winner

**Assignment**

Write a short poem of about 10-20 lines of prose, where you choose a popular figure/character that people recognize, and add a new spin to his/her/its personality. You’ll select a character and an action, then write a short scene.

**Goal**

The main objective is to portray this commonly known character in a different light. Use your imagination and add something unique to a stock character’s personality. Another objective is to render a vivid scene, rich with sensory detail. The poem may be funny, sad, serious, sarcastic, strange, dark, tender, or whatever you think it should be.

**Step 1** Brainstorm characters (on the board in class): Jot down a list of 20-30 well-known characters. They can be fictional or real people.

*Examples: the president, the Easter Bunny, Superman, George Washington, Death, Jesus Christ, Michael Jackson, Mother Earth, Cinderella, Snoopy, Humpty Dumpty, etc.*

* Mention that as writers, you always need to consider who your audience is. Santa Claus has a wider reaching audience than Ami and Yumi would.

**Step 2** Brainstorm action/condition (on the board in class): Jot down a list of 20 actions or conditions.

*Examples: washes a car, buys a fur coat, gets a haircut, gets a cold, plays soccer, forgets her keys, is allergic to cats, washes an elephant, breaks his arm, has two left feet, etc.*

* It may be helpful to choose the action/condition according to who the character is because it may be more relevant. Ex: Superman is afraid of flying.

**Step 3** Individually, students choose their one character and one action/condition.

**Step 4** Start writing your poem. The opening line may simply be the character and the action. Ex: Superman is afraid to fly.

**Step 5** Revise the work (teacher or peer revision).

**Step 6** Read aloud.

**Tips for students**

- If you get stuck or have writer’s block, start by free-writing about your character. The more you know about your character, the more you’ll know what his or her actions or dialogue would be.
- Let the poem evolve. Try not to impose a theme on it before you start.
- Choose just one or a few actions and really focus on them. Take your time in describing things vividly and colorfully, instead of trying to cram tons of details into very plain lines.
- Use your imagination!! Odd, unique combinations and descriptions are good! Surprise and engage the reader.

**Tips for Teachers**

- Allow students enough time to write. Perhaps start in class and let students take the work home to finish.
- Remind students that revision is a key part of the writing process.
- Have students switch papers a few times in order to get a wide range of possibilities.
- Read poetry aloud. It is important for the students to read their work (or another student’s work) aloud, and for you to read poems aloud to the class.

**Variations to the poem**

- Artwork accompanies this poem very well.
- Write a character sketch or a biography of this character. Where was he/she born? What are his/ her likes and dislikes? etc.
- Write a dialogue in the voice of the character. What would he/she think or say? What does Superman really think about his cape or about changing in telephone booths?
Early in our lives we experience the birth of self-consciousness, also called self-awareness—an awareness of the distinction between self and the world. This happens when a person is about two years old. A newborn infant is not yet conscious of being a self. With good parenting, infants initially experience the world as an extension of themselves: they get hungry, they get fed; they get wet, they get changed; they cry, they get picked up. But at some point, infants in the process of becoming toddlers become aware that the world is separate from themselves.

William Wordsworth, in his poem entitled “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” suggests that we come from God and that when we are very young, we still remember this:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

But the process of growing up, of learning about this world, is a process of increasingly forgetting the one from whom we came and in whom we live. The birth and intensification of self-consciousness, of self-awareness, involves a separation from God. However, Wordsworth also notes that in childhood we still remember our origin and that we access that origin through our imagination:

Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy,  
But He  
Beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
He sees it in his joy;  
The Youth, who daily farther from the east  
Must travel, still is Nature’s Priest,  
And by the vision splendid  
Is on his way attended;

Despite these memories and other flights of fancy in childhood, the birth of self-consciousness is the birth of the separated self. When this happens, the natural and inevitable result is self-concern. The two go together: the separated self and the self-centered self.

The birth of self-consciousness, of the separated self, is one of the central meanings of the Garden of Eden story. It is humanity’s story. Adam and Eve, living in a paradisiacal state, become conscious of opposites, of good and evil. The result is terrible: they cover themselves, no longer naked and unashamed; they experience life as toil and burden; they are expelled from paradise. The Genesis story ends with them (and us) living their (and our) lives “east of Eden,” estranged and in exile.

The birth of the separated self—what one might call “the fall”—is something we go through early in our own lives. We have all experienced this. Moreover, it cannot be avoided; it is utterly necessary. We cannot develop into mature human beings without self-consciousness. And yet it is a “fall”—into a world of self-consciousness and self-centeredness, estrangement and exile. Wordsworth says that “At length the Man perceives [heaven] die away, / And fade into the light of common day” (stanza 5).

The sense of separation and self-concern is intensified by the process of growing up. Commonly called “socialization,” this process involves internalizing within the self the central “messages” of one’s upbringing, such as parental messages, cultural messages, and, for some of us, religious messages.

The result: we descend more deeply into the world of self-consciousness and self-concern. Our identity and way of being are more and more shaped by the “world” as we internalize it in the process of growing up. The world of the child, with its mystery and magic, is left farther and farther behind.

By the time we are in early adolescence, perhaps earlier, our sense of who we are is increasingly the product of culture. We feel okay or not okay about ourselves to the extent that we measure up to the messages we have internalized: Am I attractive enough? Am I cool? Am I good enough?
A poem by Billy Collins, poet laureate of the United States, captures the ache and loss at the end of childhood. Its title is significant:

“On Turning Ten”

The whole idea of it makes me feel like I’m coming down with something, something worse than any stomach ache or the headaches I get from reading in bad light—a kind of measles of the spirit, a mumps of the psyche, a disfiguring chickenpox of the soul.

You tell me it is too early to be looking back, but that is because you have forgotten the perfect simplicity of being one and the beautiful complexity introduced by two. But I can lie on my bed and remember every digit. At four I was an Arabian wizard. I could make myself invisible By drinking a glass of milk a certain way. At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince.

But now I am mostly at the window watching the late afternoon light. Back then it never fell so solemnly against the side of my tree house, and my bicycle never leaned against the garage as it does today, all the dark blue speed drained out of it.

This is the beginning of sadness, I say to myself, as I walk through the universe in my sneakers. It is time to say good-bye to my imaginary friends, time to turn the first big number.

It seems only yesterday I used to believe there was nothing under my skin but light. If you cut me I would shine. But now when I fall upon the sidewalks of life I skin my knees. I bleed.

We fall farther into the world of separation and alienation, comparison and judgment—of self and others. The self can become somebody great, or only okay, or “not much.”

Thus we need to be born again. It is the road of return from our exile, the way to recover our true self, that path to beginning to live our lives from the inside out rather from the outside in. To be born again involves dying to the false self, to that identity, to that way of being that comes from separation and alienation, and to be born into an identity centered again in the Spirit, in the reorganized imagination.

Writing Directions

Write a poem that will help us to remember the whole selves we all once were in childhood; or, write a poem that will help us see our fall from grace in the process of growing up; or, write a poem about coming to knowledge about the world in the process of growing up; or, write a poem that will help us be reborn.

Student Example:

Tree Climbing

The swaying beech you climbed at dawn held you in a soft embrace. At its feathery top, you looked down and saw the land before you—a faery-king’s domain. Is this what it’s like to be grown up? Cool shade brought you back to the boughs, and you lay in a twiggy throne, counting jewel-bright insects, watching the sun laze by. Is this what it’s like to be grown up? With a quick twist, you dropped to swing from a limb with ease. But as your young body grew, there seemed more of a weight on your shoulders. Waves of sorrow and strain, raindrops of small uncertainties, feelings you hadn’t known flooded your childhood kingdom, wiping it away. The branch you grasped became slippery from the stormy night. With a last desperate glance above at the sky’s dark clouds, you knew: grown-ups don’t climb trees. You let go, Falling to the world.

by Erin Swift
7th grade, Seabury Hall
Poetry Perspectives
(can be modified to fit any grade level)
by Frank Briguglio, Iolani School

Goal
To write a four-stanza poem about a hobby, sport or pastime or activity that you do, for the most part, alone.

The assignment usually makes my students think about point of view and about objectivity - subjectivity in their approach to the poem’s tone, details and imagery.

Brief Description
Write: A first stanza of three to four lines describing a hobby or fun activity that you do alone – from your own point of view.

A second stanza of three or four lines about you and your hobby, but from your parents’ perspective.

A third stanza from a friend’s perspective, again about you and your hobby.

A fourth stanza about you and your hobby, but from an “older you” perspective...as an “older you” looks back at a “younger you.”

Student Example:

Skateboarding

My friends have shown me how to stand, pivot, power-slide, how to balance a manual, pop, slide, and land for ollies.*

Now, on my own, I practice landing my tricks with style, rebounding from falls, remaining persistent if I bail, playing it cool when I land a good trick, and wearing a look that asks, “Can you do better?”

by Clay Ozaki-Train
8th grade, Iolani School

*ollie – to pop the board, slide your foot and level out so that you get air.
Sorry

Silence speaks a thousand words, and stillness expresses a hundred emotions.
My hair covers my eyes, my hat covers my hair and the night covers everything else. But it doesn’t cover the feeling. Unspoken words hang in the air like smoke. Sitting apart, waiting together, until one of us builds up the courage and in a whisper says, ‘I’m sorry.”

by Daniel Allen
12th grade, Kahuku High School
2nd place, Star Poets 2004

Art by Judith Render Carlson
**Description of a Person/Animal Poem**

by Gail Schroers, Iolani School, Grade 9

**Goal**

In this lesson, students will:
- practice using concrete detail
- practice showing rather than telling
- practice conveying a moment in time
- learn the importance of punctuation and lining in poetry

Supplies: Paper and pencil for the initial drafts and a word processor for the final draft

**Instructions**

**Day One:**
1. Introduce the assignment by having students read and discuss a few published poems that describe a particular person/animal (or an inanimate object that has been personified). Suggested poems include:
   - “The Runner” by Walt Whitman
   - “The Base Stealer” by Robert Francis
   - “A Mongoloid Child Handling Shells on the Beach” by Richard Snyder
   - “Roaches” by Peter Wild
   - “Fog” by Carl Sandburg
   - “Foal” by Mary Britton Miller
2. For homework, ask students to generate a list of people/animals for which they might create a poem.

**Day Two:**
1. Have students brainstorm as a class the various people/animals they might be able to observe closely and, thus, be able to bring alive in a poem.
2. Ask students to choose two or three possible subjects for their poems and freewrite for fifteen minutes to generate details on one or more of these subjects.
3. Have students next make a chart for the five senses. Ask them to place the details from their freewrite into the chart according to the appropriate sense. Encourage them to add details as they come to them.
4. Go around the room, having the students state their subjects and offer a couple sensory details from their charts. Encourage students to continue adding to their charts as they listen and have new ideas.
5. For homework have students select their subjects and create 10-20 lines of poetry, using the details from the sensory charts.

**Day Three:**
1. Have students share their poetry in small groups. Have them examine diction, imagery, lining, rhythm, and concrete detail. (Note: Students need to have a working knowledge of each of these areas.) Ask them to underline or highlight the words and phrases they particularly like. They should circle those words or phrases that need work and, in the margin, suggest possible improvements.
2. While students are working in groups, circulate and occasionally bring to the class’s attention lines that are particularly strong or could be made strong with just a small change. These examples can be put on the board.
3. For homework have students revise their poems based upon their classmates’ suggestions and their own ideas for improvement.

**Day Four:**
1. Discuss with the students the use of strong verbs and the importance of effective punctuation, providing examples of both.
2. Allow students time to improve these two areas in their poems.
3. For homework have students create the final draft of their poems. (Note: I generally allow students to do one more revision after I have collected and commented on their poems.)

**Student Example:**

Mr. Bouncer

by Scott Wada

Standing idly behind a red velvet rope, crossing his muscular arms across his broad chest, Eyes scanning the crowd shrouded by his dark sunglasses. His silver chain and Rolex watch glisten in the spotlight. Greets the V.I.P.s into the club, Shoves those who aren’t as lucky. A fight breaks out. Fists fly, back and forth Impacting chin, cheek, gut. A choking headlock pins the perpetrator to the ground. He nonchalantly wipes his collar, Shakes off the sweat And resumes his position at the door.
Persona Poem
by Bruce Schauble, Punahou School

Goal
Write a poem in which a creature or object other than a human being says what it has to say.

Instructions
The first level of performance is to use a voice other than your own. The second is to go beyond the predictable into the surprising, the mysterious, the exquisite. Animal poems offer an interesting subset of the genre. You might begin by asking the students what a spider or a bat might have to say about itself, and then ask what it might have to say about humans. Then read and discuss one of the model poems. Ask the students what surprises them about the poems, what the poems make

Student Examples:

Cloud
I'm white.
Everyone can see me.
I get treated very nicely
because people can't touch me.
When I'm very hot, cold
air feels cool like ice cream.
I hate when people step on me
in their dreams.

–by Cheri Wollen

Lobster
I crawl in the deepest waters,
grabbing for fish with my deadly claws,
waiting for your traps to trick me.
When they do I don't fight back,
My claws tied, my mouth clenched.
You hold me up, I wiggle around,
You stare into my eyes without reason,
then drop me into the boiling water.
My skin blushes a gory red.

–by Amy Chodroff

The Bat
Being a mammal, I have less care than birds,
Being a flight-borne creature, need no home,
So while the beaver builds its, robin its nest,
I hook my hind feet into a wall or ceiling
And hang there looking at the world made silly
By being turned around and upside-down.
Sleep, sleep is my nourishment, I sleep
All day, all winter, and my young's but one.
At first I fly with it at my breast, even hunting,
But if it bores me I hang it on a wall
And go alone, enjoying insects frankly.
Tons, tons, I devour tons of insects, half
Of my weight is insects eaten within one night,
Yet cleverer than the swift or swallow, I deploy
Twist, turn, dodge, catch mosquitoes one by one.
And if the human family finds me odd,
No odder they, locked in their crazy yards.

–by Ruth Herschberger

Spider
I am not obvious. I remain
in the corners of your rooms,
riding the silence of eight legs.
I weave my thread to your walls,
protecting you from collapse.
They will not fall.
I take your words, the harsh ones,
and wrap them in silver.
I become their sting,
the bearer of your poison.
Even if you kill me,
I will watch out for you. See the rain?
May it cleanse you. May you grow with it.
At night when you are sleeping,
my brothers come back to you,
bearing your words of silver between them.
You will be forgiven.

–by Stephen Dobyns

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Even if you kill me,
I will watch out for you. See the rain?
May it cleanse you. May you grow with it.
At night when you are sleeping,
my brothers come back to you,
bearing your words of silver between them.
You will be forgiven.

–by Stephen Dobyns
Goal

Write a poem in which you tell the story of a time when you did something you were not supposed to do.

Instructions

The model is a memory poem, one of many written by Roethke based on his experiences as a child in Michigan, where his family had a number of greenhouses. With this and other poems based on memory, it is recommended that you 1) encourage plenty of oral discussion before writing and 2) use the memory questions as a basis for a prewriting or brainstorming exercise. The lead-in question is “As a child, did you ever do something you knew you weren’t supposed to do?” As you work through the memory questions, the students should fill the page with words and phrases that the questions call to mind. Then cut and rearrange those words into a single sentence, seven-line poem.

Model poem:

Child on Top of a Greenhouse

The wind billowing out the seat of my britches,
My feet crackling splinters of glass and dried putty,
The half-grown chrysanthemums staring up like accusers,
Up through the streaked glass, flashing with sunlight,
A few white clouds all rushing eastward,
A line of elms plunging and tossing like horses,
And everyone, everyone pointing up and shouting!

– by Theodore Roethke

Steps in working through memory exercise:

1) Read model poem aloud.
2) Student reads model poem aloud.
3) What has the poet done?
4) What line(s) do you like best? What images do you like?
5) Any questions about parts you do not understand?
6) Reread poem aloud.
7) Teacher may wish to share own memory at this point: “This poem reminds me of the time that I...”
8) Ask student to identify a particular memory and imagine being at the scene again. As you ask the following questions aloud, leading them through the memory, have students jot down notes on paper. Not every question will have an answer. If a question does not seem to fit the memory, students should just wait for the next one.

Where are you? (If you were to find yourself there, how would you know where you were?)
What time of year is it? (How do you know?) What time of day is it? (How do you know?)
What is the weather like?
Where is the light coming from?
Who is with you? What are you wearing?
What can you see? Name some things you could you point to. Name some things you could touch.
What do the things you see remind you of?
What can you hear? What does each sound remind you of?
What can you smell? What does the smell remind you of?
How do you feel? Physical sensations? Emotions?
What is the most significant object in this memory? Describe.
Are any words spoken? Can you remember any of the exact words?
What actions or events take place? List them in order.
What color do you associate with this memory? What animal? What plant?
How do you feel about this memory now? Sad? Embarrassed? Angry?
What is the most important thing about this memory?
Is there anything else that I haven’t asked about this memory that needs to be said?

9) Ask students to look at their lists and underline or circle any words or groups of words would be useful to them if they were to try to shape this memory into a poem. Then have them number the chosen items in the order in which they might come up.

10) Students draft the poem by writing out the selected words in the selected order, and adding anything that seems to be needed in the way of connecting tissue.

Student Examples:

1) In the middle of the stormy day I stand
Looking at the toothbrush before me.
The windex in my hand sprays the brush,
My sister outside the door cursing
As I put the brush back where I found it.
Oh no! In the door she comes, deadly as a dragon.
I deny everything, but she still burns me with her fire.

2) We raced to the playground. She won. She always won.
In front of us, the jungle gym.
The top was so high off the ground.
“Last one to the top’s a rotten egg!” yelled Jenny,
She started to climb. I started to climb.
She was ahead. She was going to win again.
So I pushed.

3) I sit alone in my kitchen. My small, curious eyes
Glance at the scissors on the table.
My dog is in sight, resting peacefully on the white tiles.
I grasp the scissors and begin work;
The long hairs drop to the floor.
The front door opens. My heart stops.
And then....
The James Wright Poem
by Susan Lee St. John, Le Jardin Academy/Poet-in-the-Schools

Goal
To give a list of images direction and focus.

Description
We begin by reading and discussing the James Wright poem “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota.” The poem is a list of pastoral images, idyllic in tone, until you come to the last line: “I have wasted my life.” I ask the students: how does the poem lead to the last line? Or does it lead to the last line? Could the line, “I have not wasted my life.” be substituted with the same effect?

The last line seems to be a sort of epiphany that the poet arrives at after cataloging certain details of place. The students begin writing their own poems by choosing a closing line from a list of metaphors they had written earlier. Then they take their list of sensory experiences and choose images that are connected in some way to the closing line. (See Middle School lesson, p. 16).

This exercise goes through several drafts. Below is an example I gave to the students—the example poem was created from lines written by different students in the 10th grade class at Le Jardin Academy.

Draft 1
Choose a simile or metaphor for your last line. Pull out sensory images that are connected to the last line. Minimum of 12 lines.

Opening the refrigerator in the dark of midnight, eating a piece of plain bread after peeling an orange, and smelling the caramelizing onions, The silver moonlight glists through the shutters dancing among the inviting fireflies, crickets singing in the evening, the elegant wafting of leaves in the wind, the living room light becoming brighter as the knob is slowly twisted, a candle in a church, the receding light of a fluorescent bulb, the dawn light breaking through early morning clouds, Dreams whisper like a hinted glance.

Draft 2
Add in contrast (between light and dark, cold and hot, etc.) and orientation in space. Think about keeping it to one time and place.

Opening the refrigerator in the dark of midnight, the incandescent bulb glaring in the cold whiteness, eating a piece of plain bread after peeling an orange, and smelling the caramelizing onions, The silver moonlight glists through the shutters dancing among the inviting fireflies, crickets singing in the evening, looking beyond the black asphalt a candle in a church, the receding light of a fluorescent bulb, the dawn light breaking through early morning clouds, Dreams whisper like a hinted glance.

Draft 3
Revise for logic: One line should follow from the previous one. Consider adding in a person (perhaps the narrator) and follow that person’s movements throughout the poem. Consider changing the order of the lines. Add a title and revise for the sound of the lines, and add variety in the line length and sound. Think about using repetition.

Upon Waking in the Dark of Midnight

Even before you open your eyes, you (are conscious of) perceive the scent of caramelized onions hanging in the greasy air, Can you feel your bare feet against the cold bedroom tile padding down the hall Watch the silver moonlight dance among the fireflies and dart through the shutters In the kitchen the refrigerator waits, its incandescent bulb glares in the cold whiteness, You peel an orange and then eat a plain piece of bread the sticky acid from the orange lingers on your fingers. Outside leaves waft in the wind,
you look beyond the yard, beyond the black asphalt, beyond the next county line, and there, a candle glows so silently in a church. But here in your kitchen you switch off the light and the blue glow of the fluorescent bulb recedes. Dawn breaks through clouds, and dreams whisper like the hint of a glance.

Draft 2
The survival of Life depends on the never ending cycle of Death and Rebirth. The darkness made the stars fall from the sky, Falling into the ocean Where they will forever stay Until the end of time. The faded and gloomy candlelight Helped make a way for the shadows To trail and encompass me. The softness of my own heart Made everything seem Dead and cold like trees in winter. I watched a snail crawl along the edge of a razor. That’s my dream, That’s my nightmare to crawl to slither along the edge of a razor and surviving. Life is a black and white river, because you never step in the same river twice.

Draft 3
I watch the eclipse make the stars descend from the sky, Where they will stay until the end of time. I can feel it trailing me, encompassing me. I watch the decaying candlelight help make a gateway for the dim and shadows of the night to walk and die. The softness of my own heart seems to make everything dead and frozen Like trees during winter. I watch a snail crawl along the edge of a razor. That’s my dream, that’s my nightmare To crawl, to slither along the edge of a razor and survive. Life is an obsidian and bloodless river ’Cause you never step in the Same river twice.

— by Francesca Crudo
Spoon River Anthology
by Susan Lee St. John, Le Jardin Academy/Poet-in-the-Schools

Goal
To gain a deeper understanding of Edgar Lee Masters’ work and an understanding of the kind of creative “research” that goes into developing character.

Description
Spoon River Anthology is a collection of confessional monologues told by the deceased in a fictional small town cemetery. Assign each of your students a monologue to present to the class. The student should memorize the monologue and after the presentation, the student remains in character while the audience asks the character questions. The audience might ask about what a certain word in the monologue means or for clarification about a certain phrase, or they may ask about the character's life: what is his or her attitude towards life? Any regrets? What was most important?

The answers to the questions should be discernable from the monologues. To discourage frivolous questions, the audience members may be asked to answer their own questions. To help students prepare for the presentation, I give them a “character bone structure” chart (from Lajos Egri’s The Art of Dramatic Writing, p. 36), and ask them to fill it in as much as possible.

Physiology of Character
- skin color
- posture
- general appearance
- defects if any
- heredity

Sociology
- race or nationality
- place in community
- political affiliations
- amusements or hobbies

Psychology
- moral standards
- ambition
- frustrations and disappointments
- temperament
- attitude toward life
- I.Q.
- complexes or phobias
- introvert
- extravert
- abilities
- qualities (imagination, judgment, taste, poise, generosity, selfishness, etc.)

After the presentations, we took a tour of Oahu Cemetery. Our guide was Nanette Napoleon who took us through the cemetery and told us stories about the people buried there. Ask your students to take notes, because when they get back to class they will write a monologue for a person in Oahu Cemetery.

Student Examples:

James Muir
James Muir was a survivor of the USS Saginaw, which wrecked on Kure Lagoon 134 years ago. Muir and four other men volunteer to sail on a makeshift raft to get help. After 31 days the raft washed ashore on Kauai'i, and Muir died on the beach. He is buried in Nu‘uanu Cemetery.

All I remember was the boat
The little boat
Shattering
Breaking beneath us
I couldn’t swim very well
The water was cold
Someone helped me to shore
On the sand I lay
Gasping
Vomiting from the salt water
There was the light
The sun

—Tom Cassady

Alice Dreier
Alice Juanita Dreier was eleven when she died of a ruptured appendix aboard ship on route to San Francisco.

I was told by my parents, that I need to go to a good boarding school to get far in life.
So they sent me to a boarding school in California. They loaded me and my sister on the ship, the S.S. Ventura, and sent us away.
On the way I got sick. My appendix burst and I died.
Now how do I get far in life?

—Jake Adelman
Using Food to Inspire Your Writing
(can be adapted to any grade level)
Lani Uyeno, English professor, Leeward Community College

Idea #1
I teach an autobiographical writing course at Leeward Community College, and for one of the memoirs, we focus on food and a memory associated with that food.

A. I was surprised, the first time I came up with the idea, that students had so many rich memories associated with food.

B. What I’ve found is that many of us associate food with “small kid time,” or with a particular place, or a special person.

C. Example: Orlando Tumacder’s piece “Forbidden Fruits, Lifelong Fantasy.” (Read first paragraph.)
“I’m a crack seed connoisseur. Since small kid time, I’ve had a sweet-sour tooth. For me, no other local snack is as onolicious. Yes, I enjoy chewing on cuttlefish legs and munching on Maui potato chips, but I’d rather suck seeds. Arare is appealing and an iso peanut is so tasty, but seeds are no ka oi. Football olives, shredded mangos, crispy cherries—how they broke da mouth. Li hing mui? I adore it.”

D. Describe a person you associate with the food.
1. Who is the person?
2. What does he/she look like?
3. Use dialogue to show your interactions with this person.
4. What kind of clothes did the person wear?

Example (again from Orlando Tumacder’s piece):
“Tai Sing Store on the corner of Cane Street and California Avenue in Wahiawa—that’s where you’d often find me in the early 1960s, ogling the many jars filled with those delectable preserved fruits. But never did I make a purchase, for they were too expensive. The old Chinese proprietor, weary of my loitering, would shoo me away, saying “You go now. If you no buy, no come my store.” With a heavy heart, I’d depart.”

E. Recapture a moment in time when you ate your comfort food.
1. Describe the experience.
2. Who else was there?
3. Where were you?

Example:
“With the remaining 50 cents, I bought a ticket to the matinee and a large cut of Pepsi. For two hours, I slurped and sucked and sipped. When the seeds were gone, I tore the bag open and licked it clean. Don’t ask me what movie was showing that day; I cannot recall. But I can tell you that for one all-too-brief afternoon, I knew bliss. All was well with the world, but I had just savored a slice of heaven.”

F. Write an instant version of the piece.

G. Do a paired sharing with your partner.

H. Volunteers to share with large group.

Idea #2
What we’re going to do today is some preliminary writing that focuses on food and a particular memory you have surrounding that food. We’ll be doing short pieces of writing and reading some of the pieces to each other. Hopefully, you’ll like what you write and continue to work on it, even after the workshop is over. Here’s the process:

A. Brainstorm a list of all of your “comfort foods”—foods that make you think of home, small kid time, your mom’s kitchen. Brainstorm a list of your favorite comfort foods.
1. Share your list with a partner. Then circle your favorite three comfort foods. Then put a star next to your #1 favorite.
2. Share this with big group: Put a list on overhead.

B. Describe your favorite comfort food and your experience of eating it.
1. A web works well for this kind of description: place the name of your food in the middle of the web and add circles as follows. Then list descriptions. (5-7 minutes)
2. I’ll pass around different foods for you to sample as you are doing your descriptions.

C. Is there a place you associate with this food?
1. Describe the place and the atmosphere.
2. What do you remember doing there?
3. Who else was there? What were the circumstances?
What makes a good poem?

It is really hard to say because there are many kinds of poems and different definitions. Different people like different kinds. It is something personal that changes as you grow, and you keep growing in your head all your life. As you grow, your likes and dislikes change and what you used to like gets boring sometimes. So you want something new. Actually, this is what creativity is about, something new to you. After a while, when that isn’t new, you look for something that is. Keep looking. Keep growing. Good creative poems will always be there. After all, you don’t want to stay five years old in your head forever.

What’s a good creativity exercise?

For all ages, the “Word Bag” is a fun exercise. All it takes are words on pieces of paper. Words cut out from magazines in different sizes and colors. Nouns and verbs you don’t use too often that you write on a piece of paper and Xerox for the whole class to cut out. A few adjectives and adverbs and connector words thrown in. When you mix the words in a bag and grab a handful, you don’t know what you’ll get, and when you try to just put them together in some kind of sentence you can make all kinds of unheard of ideas! When you find a good one, follow it, add to it, and even turn it into a story. Or just describe in more detail the picture that it makes you think of. That original image can be a great poem! At this point, you can use fewer words from that bag and add more of your own as you go along. Whatever!

If you want to do this game with a certain subject in mind, like Mother’s Day, make sure you add lots of words that are related to what mothers like to do. Or if you want to do a science poem exercise, put in a lot about whales or volcanoes or whatever. It can be fun and educational, too. Enjoy!

Books for teaching poetry

Books by Kenneth Koch:
Wishes, Lies and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry
Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?: Teaching Great Poetry to Children
Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures of Reading and Writing Poetry
The Art of Poetry (Poets on Poems)

Bamboo Ridge Press:
Small Kid Time Hawaii
Eric Chock, editor

National Council of Teachers of English:
Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents
by Joe Tsujimoto, Punahou School

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